



Arizona "The Good Oak Tree"



Where Did the Name "Arizona" Originate?

Long before Arizona became associated with the United States of America, the area just south of the present international border at Nogales, and particularly a ranching community within that area, was known as *Arizona*. The earliest known records of a place called *Arizona* date back to the spring of 1736.

The State of Arizona takes its name from a ranch started by Bernardo de Urrea sometime between 1734 and 1736. The general area around his ranch was also known as *Arizona*. He and a majority of the first explorers, settlers, and miners in the area were Basque, and it is they who probably gave the Basque name *Arizona* ("the good oak tree") to the region. Oak trees are abundant both at the original ranch and the entire area between present-day Nogales, Arizona and Saric, Sonora.



The original *Arizona* Ranch lies about 40 miles southwest of Tumacácori in what is today Sonora, Mexico. Fifteen miles from the *Arizona* Ranch, up a rugged canyon today known as the *Planchas de Plata* Canyon, massive pieces of silver were discovered in the fall of 1736 by a Yaqui Indian named Antonio Siraumea.

Prospectors and miners rushed to the area of the great silver discovery. It was given the name *San Antonio de Padua* by *Justicia Mayor* Juan Bautista de Anza when he arrived on the scene in November and ordered that all the silver that had been taken from the site be impounded and brought to Urrea's *Arizona* Ranch, some fifteen miles down the canyon.

Because Anza's *escribano* (scribe), Manuel José de Sosa, dated all the impounding documents at *Arizona*, people in faraway places like Guadalajara and Mexico City were soon referring to the silver as the "silver of *Arizona*." Thus, *Arizona* quickly became a household word associated with great and sudden wealth.

"Toward the end of last October, between the Guevavi Mission and the ranchería called Arizona, some balls and slabs of silver were discovered, one of which weighed more than one hundred arrobas (2,500 pounds), a sample of which I am sending to you, Most Illustrious Lord."

Captain Juan Bautista de Anza to Bishop Benito Crespo, January 7, 1737.

In the high country between *Rancho Arizona* and the *Planches de Plata*, in the 270 years since the original silver discovery at *San Antonio de Padua*, the hills have been mined extensively in search of more of the enormous chunks of virgin silver.

However, after the initial silver rush in November of 1736, in which some four tons of the precious metal were removed from the area, no more than ten additional pounds of silver were removed by Spanish miners. Large, modern mining companies that have worked the area over the years since then have never been able to make it pay, and have moved on.



Other "Arizonas"

Since the Spanish went nearly everywhere in the new world, and since the Basques were part of the Spanish colonial empire, it is to be expected that other places named Arizona would crop up where there were oak trees and a Spanish presence - and that is exactly the case.

The three places named Arizona in the United States (other than the State of Arizona) were all on or near Spanish trade and exploration routes, and were all established before Arizona became a territory. All are in areas where oak trees grow in abundance.

Arizona, Nebraska is in Burt County on the Missouri River. It was established as a township in 1855 on the old Spanish river trading route. Arizona, Texas, in Walker County, was established at about the same time. Arizona, Louisiana, in Claiborne Parish in the northern part of the state, became an "Anglo" community in 1866.

In Latin America there is an Arizona in each of the following:

Guatemala - Escuintla Province
Honduras - Atlántida Province
Costa Rica - Guanacaste Province
Colombia - Meta, Magdalena, and
Guaviare Provinces
Brazil - Rio Grande do Norte, Piaui,
Bahia, Minas Gerais, and Goias
Provinces
Argentina - San Luis Province

There is also an Arizona in Namibia, Africa, the origin of which is being researched at this time.
